

Letter from Taizé

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Taizé and Eastern Europe

IN A FEW WEEKS:

THE EUROPEAN MEETING OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN MUNICH

Welcoming Young Adults from Throughout Europe

Those who will be going to the European meeting of young adults in Munich will carry with them the hopes of many others: How can we build a Europe which is reconciled? How can we renew our communion with Christ? How can we build solidarity and justice? The questions are many. Answers, or beginnings of answers, will come through the conversations, the times of common prayer, the meetings with witnesses of Christian life in Munich, reflections on Bible texts and on the letter Brother Roger will write for the year 1994.

In every country, preparations for the European meeting create opportunities to meet other young adults, to pray together. Going to meet others, making visits to groups and parishes so that they can be part of the common search, is the beginning of a pilgrimage for which the European meeting will be a stage, and this stage will then send each participant back to his or her own life and lead them to continue the pilgrimage there. We can walk together, even if each person is not at the same point in their searching:

"The last European meeting has an important place in my heart," writes Alina from Romania. "There I met other young people who felt the same way I do. In this way I learned a lot about the human heart and about how to come closer to God.

"I went to the European meeting without really knowing whether I believed in God. After taking part in the Bible introductions, I began to ask myself questions for the first time. Upon my return, I took part in groups with other young people and I found the road to God easier. In my discovery of Orthodoxy, I was helped by Christians of other confessions, so I will always remain attached to the search for reconciliation."

In Munich itself, the preparation is not only a matter of solving the practical problems linked to the meeting. It is also an adventure calling for trust, with hundreds of different parishes:

"A few of us came from Taizé to Munich in mid-September to help with the preparation in the parishes of the city and its surroundings. The quality of the welcome impressed us. The parishes had already planned meetings before our arrival. After the preliminary meetings by zone, many smaller meetings are taking place. Sometimes this is with the group that will be in charge of the preparation. Often, too, we are invited to speak to parish councils and we notice how seriously people are taking the task of welcoming participants. The

parishes quickly understood that all the groups, not just the young people, should feel a part of things.

"After the preliminary information, different tasks are distributed. Some go to visit families to invite them to open their homes to the young Europeans who will come. Others are already preparing the mornings during the European meeting, where the accent will be on discovering the neighbourhood. They are looking for signs of hope, people committed in the life of the church and the neighbourhood. In general the groups of preparation meet regularly, and begin with a time of prayer.

"One question keeps coming up: will we find enough places for everybody? People are not discouraged; on the contrary, this stimulates them to go towards others, to dare and visit their neighbours or groups they are unfamiliar with, to ask for their collaboration. We have already visited more than 300 congregations. The support we have received from the Catholic and Lutheran dioceses has been irreplaceable. The many invitations we have received to explain the meaning of the meeting has enabled us to give the parish communities detailed information.

"The parishes outside Munich, in the surrounding towns, have also begun to make preparations. There, people know



one another better than in the large city and open their doors more easily. We will certainly find more places there in families. These small towns are very accessible thanks to the suburban railway system. All these trains have a station near the large square in Munich where the meals will be distributed during the European meeting, right in front of the halls where the common prayers will be held.

"Prayer is at the centre of the preparation. In the evenings we take part in prayer services in the parishes. And many people come to pray with us at midday, in a prayer we began in a large church in the centre of town. The preparation itself is a kind of pilgrimage, with times of Bible meditation every two weeks. In this way, many of the inhabitants of Munich are getting ready with joy to welcome young adults from every country of Europe."

"MEASURE THE HOUSE AND TELL US HOW MANY PEOPLE WE CAN WELCOME."

Those who are setting out, in their village or neighbourhood, to make visits for the meeting are giving the most concrete image possible of the "pilgrimage of trust." Their efforts will bear fruit far beyond the meeting itself. Each time, they return home with beautiful experiences:

"We divided up the streets of our village of 2000 inhabitants and we visited, by twos, all the families. I began these visits two weeks ago with one of the shopkeepers. People were surprised to see that respectable lady going from door to door to ask for places for the young people who will be coming to Munich.

"The first day, after visiting three

houses, we hesitated before going to the fourth one. We knew that an elderly couple lived there. The husband was working in the garden. He called his wife. We explained the meeting, our enthusiasm, the joy of welcoming to our village young people from throughout Europe.

"They replied, 'It's not for us; we are not young any more.' Then they said they would think about it and we got up to go. But before we could open the garden gate, they said, 'We'll welcome four girls and four boys.' And the man added, 'I will make breakfast. I always get up early.'

"One day we came to a large house. A woman opened the door. We introduced ourselves. She explained that her husband had been ill for the past four years and she was not even able to go to church. She was visibly moved as she said to us, 'I won't be able to welcome anyone, but I am so thankful for your visit.'

"Now people are waiting for our visits. In one house the coffee had al-

ready been prepared for us. When we arrived, they told us, 'Here is a yardstick; measure the house and tell us how many people we can welcome.'

Christ Jesus, if we pray, if we give you our trust, it is not because it is useful to believe, but because you allow us to live, in you, a surprising reality: the Kingdom of God is at hand, it is in our midst.

Prayer by Brother Roger

ready been prepared for us. When we arrived, they told us, 'Here is a yardstick; measure the house and tell us how many people we can welcome.'

"These visits, with all their surprises, show us that when we listen to others, when we share their joys and their sorrows, they are very open. Now it happens that people in the village ask one another, 'And how many are *you* welcoming?'"

Munich:
dare to go towards others, to visit
neighbours and welcome with them
young adults from throughout Europe



Taizé and Eastern Europe

(first part)

Bringing to Life the Message of Reconciliation

The story of the relationship between Taizé and the countries of Eastern Europe has never been written. To fill that gap is beyond our abilities; we are neither historians nor theologians, but rather an entomologist and a musician. And yet we dare to write on this subject, because the story is also in part our own story, that of a young Hungarian couple who has been deeply influenced by Taizé for years.

Links between the community of brothers and the countries of Eastern Europe go back much further in time but, personally, we got to know Taizé in Budapest, at the end of the 1970s. Journeys to prepare hidden meetings of Christians in other Eastern European countries before the Berlin wall fell, participation in European meetings at the end of each year, frequent stays in Taizé and the desire to live out the message of reconciliation in our daily lives have given us an experience that we would like to share.

Today, the European meetings of young people deal with many critical aspects of our continent. In many ways, Taizé is present where the future of Europe is being played out. We would like to call attention to four points.

1. Being Together from Different Nations

The message of reconciliation which has been at the heart of the last few European meetings in Prague, Budapest and Vienna needs to be emphasized in the very first place. These words from a young East European sum up the challenge: "Without reconciliation, there is no future for my country, no future for Europe." At Taizé, the cultural riches of each people are celebrated at the same time as the incomparable joy of togetherness between different peoples. In this way, people realize that one's identity cannot be sought by opposition to others, but rather in a communion with all. It is not possible to hear the Bible being read in eighteen different languages during a European meeting without being awakened to a sense of the universal.

Last year, at the European meeting in Vienna, Pal Solt, the president of the Hungarian Supreme Court and the 1992 chairman of the UN European Commission on Human Rights, an old friend of Taizé, made this appeal to the young: "You can be among those who say: the prejudices that fed the hatred of one nation for another, of one people for another, will stop with me; I will not pass them on to my children." In the European meetings, Russians and Ukrainians make friends, Poles and Germans welcome one another. Each meeting is preceded by months of preparation during which young people from every country are invited to discover in their own area those who are different from them.

**In 1987, at Ljubljana (Slovenia):
the first East-West meeting**



Communion in God (continued)

By the gift of the Holy Spirit on the first Christian Pentecost, human beings of diverse backgrounds are brought together in a community where they live in a communion (*koinonia*) with God and among themselves. At the same time, there is nothing automatic about this *koinonia*; it requires an inner decision: "Change your hearts... and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2,38). In a word, it is rooted in a *metanoia*, usually translated in English by repentance.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the prophets entreat the errant nation to "return:" to turn away from their misdeeds and to turn back to the Lord (e.g. Hosea 14,2-9). In Greek, the image is rather that of a radical reorientation of one's way of thinking and acting. Jesus calls his contemporaries to trust in him and to take the Good News seriously so that it will change their lives from top to bottom (Mark 1,15).

Metanoia begins with an act of welcoming: believers open their hearts to the "gift of the Holy Spirit." But unlike human gifts, the gift of God, his Breath of life, cannot be put in our pocket or on the shelf. If we welcome it, it leads us of necessity to begin an inner transformation. The yes we say to Christ becomes the starting-point of a lifelong process of change.

This transformation is one of the main themes of the letters of Saint Paul. Sometimes he compares *metanoia* to dying with Christ (Rom 6,3-4; Col 3,3) and beginning a new life: "He died for all, so that those who are alive might no longer live for themselves, but for the One who died and rose for them" (2 Cor 5,15). The Letter to the Romans uses similar language: "Consider that you are dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus... If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, in life as in death, we belong to the Lord" (Rom 6,11; 14,8; cf. 1 Cor 3,21-23). Believers pass from a life of isolation and self-centredness to a life of relationship, a life "for

Christ." Thus Paul can turn round the image and write: "I am not the one who is living any longer: Christ is living in me" (Gal 2,20).

But belonging to Christ means having the same mindset as he did (Phil 2,5). Living for him means not seeking one's own interests but those of others; it means focussing on what unites (Phil 2,2-4), knowing that "we are all parts of one another" (Eph 4,25). This magnificent expression translates a way of looking at humanity that is just as new and revolutionary today as it was two thousand years ago. By turning a human being into someone "for God," *metanoia* makes him someone "for others," a being of communion, a *person* in the fullest sense of the term.

This change is not just a matter of behaviour, of morality: through *metanoia* expressed in baptism (Acts 2,38), believers become new beings, re-created in the image of God who is communion (Col 3,10). Consequently, for the first time in human history, the notion of a single human family becomes not just a utopia but a real possibility.

It was in the Christian communities that sprang up in the cities of the Mediterranean world that this new reality of *koinonia* was lived out in embryo. In those communities, women and men of all backgrounds lived together as one family. And the name they gave themselves clearly expressed their continuity with the history of the people of Israel. When Paul writes to "the Church of God that is in Corinth" (1 Cor 1,2), he knows that the word *ekklesia* (Church), which literally means "congregation, convocation," is used in the Bible to refer to God's people gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai at the moment when the covenant is ratified (Deut 9,10; Acts 7,38). Thus, the Church becomes itself above all when it is gathered together in God's presence, during common prayer and especially during the celebration of the Eucharist.

Today, we live our *koinonia* in different kinds of communities where something of the *ekklesia* of God manifests itself. First of all there is the local

church or parish, where people of all ages and conditions are gathered together. Then there are so-called monastic or religious communities, where men or women make a life-commitment to be a living sign of *koinonia* for others. Many other kinds of movements and groups enable believers to live more intensely one particular aspect of *koinonia*. And finally, there is the true Christian "base community," so often neglected: the couple (which becomes the family), where believers live out *koinonia* through their mutual love, thus becoming the "domestic (or house) church" (cf. Eph 5,25-33).

All these communities have certain characteristics. First, they are called to live *koinonia* in its twofold dimension of prayer and sharing or service (cf. Acts 2,42-46). Second, Christian communities always exist in response to a call from God: believers hear the voice of the shepherd and follow it (cf. John 10,3-5).

Next, a Christian community is a dynamic reality, constantly growing. Saint Paul compares it to a plant or an edifice being built (1 Cor 3,5-13). The community must help its members to grow in faith. We can call this the "motherly" aspect of the Church (cf. Gal 4,26), especially when the growth occurs through a kind of osmosis, through an intense experience of prayer and common life. And so that the growth does not take place in a disorderly way, the community needs pastors to watch over its unity, so that the different gifts awakened do not lead to dispersion and division.

Koinonia does not mean uniformity but unity in diversity, like a body with its different parts (Rom 12,4ff; 1 Cor 12). And finally, a Christian community does not exist for itself but for others. A people of priests (cf. 1 Peter 2,9), the *ekklesia* of God is called to be a sign of his selfless love in the midst of human history. It is an open community, one that goes towards others. Mission is just as essential an aspect of its life as prayer and sharing.

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

JANUARY

JOHANNINE HOURS

JEREMIAH 20,7-13

These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.

1 SAT God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father!"
Ga 4.6-7 Mt 11.28-30

2 SUN The Risen Christ said to the disciples: Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so am I sending you.
Jn 20.19-22 Col 1.13-15

3 MON John writes: The light shines in the darkness, and darkness could not overpower it.
Jn 1.1-5 Is 2.3b-4

4 TUE There is no other God but me, says the Lord. Turn to me and you will be saved, all you ends of the earth.
Is 45.22-23 Jn 1.5-8

5 WED The Word was the true light that gives light to everyone. To all those who accepted him he gave the right to become children of God.
Jn 1.9-13 Ezk 20.41-42a

6 THU EPIPHANY When they saw the star, the wise men were filled with a great joy. As they entered, they saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they knelt down and worshipped him.
Mt 2.1-12 Is 60.1-6

7 FRI The nations will walk in the light of Christ, and the kings of the earth will bring their treasure to the city of God.
Rv 21.22-26 Jn 8.12

8 SAT Sing of the Lord, for his works are great: make them known throughout the world. Cry out for joy, for God is among you.
Is 12.5-6 Jn 1.14-18

9 SUN At Jesus' baptism, a voice came from heaven saying, "You are my Son, the Beloved; my joy is in you."
Mk 1.7-11 Is 55.1-11

10 MON John said: I baptise with water; but standing among you — unknown to you — is the one who is coming after me; and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandal.
Jn 1.19-28 1 P 2.9-10

11 TUE The Lord says to his servant: It is not enough for you to be my servant. I shall make you a light to the nations so that my salvation may reach the furthest corners of the earth.
Is 49.6 Jn 1.29-34

12 WED On that day many nations will turn to God and will become his people.
Zc 2.15 Lk 6.20-23

13 THU When we were dead in our sins, God brought us to life with Christ.
Ep 2.4-5 Jn 1.43-51

14 FRI Our Saviour, Christ Jesus, has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.
2 Tm 1.9-10 Jn 2.1-12

15 SAT The Lord says: I shall make an everlasting covenant with my people, never to cease in my efforts for their good.
Jr 32.40-41 Jn 3.13-17

16 SUN Jesus asked his first disciples, "What do you want?" They answered, "Master, where do you live?" He said to them, "Come, and you will see."
Jn 1.35-42 1 S 3.3b-10, 19

17 MON The Lord God says: Look, I shall rescue my people, gathering them from east and west. They will be my people and I shall be their God, faithful and just.
Zc 8.7-8 Jn 3.18-21

18 TUE Isaiah said: For the sake of my people, I shall not keep silent. I shall not rest until her justice shines out like the breaking of day. And then all will see your justice, and you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow.
Is 62.1-5 Jn 3.22-29

19 WED The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.
Jn 3.30-36a Ws 7.26-27

20 THU Jesus said to a sick man: "Get up, pick up your sleeping mat and walk." At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.
Jn 5.1-9 Ac 10.37-38

21 FRI Jesus said: As the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.
Jn 5.19-24 Tb 14.6-7a

22 SAT God says to his people: I shall welcome you, when I gather you from all the nations where you have been scattered. Through you, I shall display my holiness for all nations to see.
Ezk 20.41-42 Jn 6.35

23 SUN Jesus said to his first disciples, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of people." And at once they left their nets and followed him.
Mk 1.14-20 Jn 3.1-5, 10

24 MON Life itself became visible, we saw it and testify to it. We proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was revealed to us.
1 Jn 1.1-4 Lk 4.1-14

25 TUE The Risen Christ said to Paul: I am sending you out so that people may turn from darkness to light and receive, through faith in me, forgiveness of their sins.
Ac 26.16b-18 Mk 16.15-18

26 WED If we walk in the light, as God is in the light, we are in communion with one another.
1 Jn 1.5-7 Lk 4.14-21

27 THU Paul writes to Titus: God gives his faithful the hope of eternal life which he promised before the beginning of time.
Ti 1.1-4 Lk 22.24-30

28 FRI Jesus said: Treat others as you would like them to treat you.
Lk 6.27-35 1 Jn 2.3-6

29 SAT The darkness is passing and the true light is already shining. Whoever loves his brother remains in the light.
1 Jn 2.8-10 Lk 10.25-28

30 SUN After hearing Jesus, people were amazed and said to each other, "Here is a new teaching, and with authority behind it: he even gives orders to unclean spirits and they obey him!"
Mk 1.21-28 1 Co 7.32-35

31 MON Let what you heard in the beginning remain in you. Thus you also will remain in the Son and in the Father.
1 Jn 2.23a-25 Mk 1.40-45

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

This text gives us a glimpse of the inner struggle undergone by one of the greatest prophets of Israel. Jeremiah, a man of peace, had to proclaim the word of the Lord which only led to resistance and violence against him, even from his own kinsfolk. Beside himself, he projected his suffering toward God. The prophet felt himself trapped in the middle between, on the one hand, the Word of God that filled him to such an extent that he could not hold it back, and on the other his countrymen, who refused to be open to God and to change their lives in consequence.

Is there a way out of such a situation? Yes, and Jeremiah discovers it by sharing his sufferings with the Lord, sometimes vehemently, rather than keeping them to himself. Jeremiah makes an act of surrender that gives him the certainty that God's cause will triumph, that God's justice will at last shine forth in the world (that is the most authentic meaning of the expression translated by "vengeance" in v.12).

The life of Jeremiah helps us understand that being called by God is not a privilege. It means instead having to live out in one's own being the contradictions of a world that ignores the source of its own existence, attempting by this concern for both God and world to close, in oneself, the gap between the two. The prophet thus gives us a foretaste of the inner struggle waged at Gethsemane, and on the cross, by the One sent by the Father to reconcile all things in himself (cf. Col 1,20; 2 Cor 5,18).

- Am I in the habit of bringing to God, in prayer, my difficulties and even my fears and doubts? Can the example of Jeremiah help me in this?
- Does my faith bring me into conflict with some aspects or values of contemporary society? Which ones? In such a situation, how can I maintain a reconciled heart?

You can also read: Jeremiah 15, 15-21; Matthew 26,36-46

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

FEBRUARY

JOHANNINE HOURS

JOHN 15, 1-17

These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.

1 TUE John writes: You know that God is just. Then you must recognize that everyone who lives justly has been born of him.

2 WED PRESENTATION OF THE LORD When Simeon saw the child Jesus, he praised God and said: Now, Lord, you can let your servant depart in peace as you promised. For my eyes have seen the salvation you have prepared for all people to see.

3 THU We are already God's children. What we shall be in the future has not yet been revealed, but we know that we shall be like him because we shall see him as he really is.

4 FRI Christ Jesus gave his life for us, and we too should give our lives for our brothers.

5 SAT Should our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knows all things.

6 SUN Jesus said to his disciples: Let us go elsewhere — to the nearby villages — so that I can proclaim the message there too.

7 MON Jesus called to himself those he wanted, and he appointed twelve to be with him and to be sent out to preach.

8 TUE God's love for us has been shown in this way: God sent his only Son into the world that we might have life through him.

9 WED No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

10 THU There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear.

11 FRI Jesus said: The kingdom of God is like this: A man scatters seed on the land. Night and day, whether he is awake or asleep, the seed sprouts and grows, he knows not how.

12 SAT Loving God means keeping his commands. And his commands are not burdensome.

13 SUN A leper came to Jesus and said, "If you are willing, you can cleanse me." Filled with compassion, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing. Be clean!"

14 MON Adore God alone; serve him faithfully with all your heart, bear in mind the great things he has done.

15 TUE When Jesus had calmed the storm on the sea, the disciples were overcome with awe and said: Who can this be? Even the wind and sea obey him.

16 WED ASH WEDNESDAY We are ambassadors for Christ; it is as though God were making his appeal through us. And we implore you in the name of Christ: be reconciled to God. Now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation.

17 THU The Lord says: I watch over my Word to see it fulfilled.

18 FRI Jesus said: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.

19 SAT If you do away with the accusing finger and malicious talk, if you give what is yours for the hungry, then your light will rise in the darkness and your darkest hour will be like the middle of the day.

20 SUN Jesus said: The kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe the good news of the Gospel.

21 MON Jesus said: In truth I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.

22 TUE Zacchaeus climbed a tree to see Jesus as he passed. Jesus said to him: "Come down. Hurry, because I am to stay at your house today." And he hurried down and welcomed him joyfully.

23 WED Jesus said: My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and put it into practice.

24 THU Jesus said: Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

25 FRI Jesus said: If you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering.

26 SAT The Lord says: Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.

27 SUN Jesus was transfigured in the presence of his disciples. And a cloud covered them with its shadow, and from the cloud a voice came, saying, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him."

28 MON You will seek the Lord your God, and you will find him if you search for him with all your heart and all your soul.

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

To speak about the People of God, the prophets sometimes used the image of the vine. God transplanted it from Egypt to Palestine to grow and bear fruit, in other words to communicate something of the living God by practicing solidarity and justice. Most often, the image is a call to conversion of heart: if the vine keeps on producing sour grapes, the farmer will have no other alternative but to pull it up and begin all over again (cf. Isa 5, 1-7; Ezek 17).

By applying the image to himself, Jesus transforms it into "good news." He is the true vine, God's seed planted in the history of the world. Now everything is different: there is no danger that this vine will fail. And each branch, if it remains on the vine, is sure to bear good fruit abundantly, even if it has to pass through trials to do so (v.2b). The branches are the disciples, united to Christ by sharing a common life.

The essential thing for believers then, is not to be concerned about "results" or to dream up ambitious projects but simply to remain linked to Christ, to "remain in his love" (v.9). Nothing is disastrous except to be cut off from the Source, to cease living in communion with Christ. And the sign that we are living in this communion is the love we have for one another, following Christ's example. In doing this, we become his friends, not just servants but free persons who are fully aware of what they are doing. Love, by its very nature, is pleased to give all to the loved one, taking no thought of its own status.

- How can I "remain in Christ," (v.4) in his love (v.9), by letting his words remain in me (v.7)?
- Have I been able to understand a difficult period in my life, afterwards, as a way that God was "pruning" me (v.2) so that I could be more transparent, more open to his love?
- What does being a friend of Christ mean to me?

You can also read: Psalm 80; 1 Corinthians 3,5-9

Communicating with Everybody

mediate access to communication is another, less evident contribution. All those who accompany young people with the desire to help them discover the meaning of prayer, the sources of faith, or simply a respect for basic human values, know what a great problem communication can be. Some Christians of an older generation can have the impression that they are speaking a language that has become incomprehensible to the young. A certain style of speaking and preaching, however beautiful it may be in itself, leaves many indifferent. Humanism that comes through reading likewise only touches a small number. In some countries of Eastern Europe in particular, the very understanding of what it means to be a human being has been ravaged by inhuman regimes. How then can we communicate not just with a chosen few, but with all?

The European meetings, with simple means, a few symbols, encounters on a human scale, a prayer accessible to all, communicate basic values. Each person, in his or her own situation, can become a searcher. In fact, we have seen this in our country—lots of people have discovered in these meetings a meaning for their life. In this respect, we have been struck by the fact that many young people who discover the faith in these meetings are led to reconsider in a positive way the faith of their parents or grandparents. And so to overcome, at least in part, the generation gap.

Discovering the Meaning of Freedom

The meaning of freedom: those who worked to bring down the walls between East and West, those who for years yearned for freedom for their people, know to what extent this freedom is fragile. One of the urgent needs in the East, therefore (but is this not also the case in the West?), is to deepen our understanding of freedom.

In the letter "A Love, Source of Freedom," made public at the European meeting in Budapest, Brother Roger quotes in a note this stern text of Vaclav Havel: "If we do not try together to rediscover and to cultivate what I call superior responsibility, things will go ill for our country. The return to freedom in a society in an advanced state of moral decay has brought about the revelation of the worst forms of human behaviour, as if all the negative sides of the human being had gained full freedom to blossom."

The tone of Brother Roger's letter is more serene. But without a doubt Taizé attempts to help the young to discover the meaning of their life and their freedom in the gift of themselves for others, in generosity and in taking responsibility for other people.

Opening a Way to the Sources of Trust

Trust, a key word. Our societies are undergoing a crisis of confidence. When he was awarded the Robert Schuman Prize in Strasbourg in November 1992, Brother Roger spoke these words: "If we were to wake up one day in societies that were extremely organized, functional, and highly technological, but where a trust from the heart had been extinguished... what would be the future of the human family? What would be the future of Europe?"

Opening a way to the sources of trust: we are tempted to describe one part of Taizé's ministry to young people today with these words. Large numbers of young people have drawn new confidence from the meditative and unpretentious common prayers which are, with the Bible studies, at the heart of the European meetings, and at the centre of the meetings in Taizé itself.

An old woman told us, "What strikes me about those who return from a stay in Taizé is that they dare to live." Trust liberates us from the feeling of "what's the use?" and enables us to place our creative gifts at the service of others.

Let us give the last word to those who are suffering most today in Europe. Learning at the end of last year that Taizé was preparing in the capital of Austria a European meeting with the theme of reconciliation and peace, Bosnian refugees in Vienna immediately had the desire to take part. They were already living crowded together in Church buildings which they were using as a refuge, but when they learned that places were needed to house young Europeans, they spontaneously offered to give up some of the space they were occupying. No one could understand better than those young Bosnians Brother Roger's call to "take a priority option for reconciliation," "not to miss the hour of reconciliation."

Anna and Zsolt Balint, Budapest

This article appeared in October 1993 in the journal *Christus*.

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Echoes from the continents

Bosnia

To Gather and to Work for Others

A young man from Sarajevo, who has been living 30 kilometres outside the city for the past eight months, writes:

"The events taking place here are sometimes not worth recalling. When you talk about them, your faith is disturbed and the blood rushes to your head. When you speak about someone who has died, it's as if you yourself were dead, because there are times when you no longer believe in forgiveness, in life. Then you understand that only the grace of God is able to wash away your feelings of guilt, of powerlessness, of fear and of hatred.

"We are experiencing a war where civilians are the victims. I know that beyond all these sufferings, we are loved by God and God wants what is best for every human being. Sometimes, because of the emotion, we withdraw into ourselves, concerned only with our own trials, and we forget others. If God wants us to be here, why not respond to what he expects of us?

"I have been at Kiseljak for eight months now. I am happy to be here. At the beginning, I didn't want to come, but I saw that everywhere people like me are living. So I decided to stay. I work with the little bit of food that I have, with my limited possibilities. I work with ten other young people. We meet once a week to pray together. They are young people with a great desire to gather and to work for others.

"At present, we are harvesting fruit. I help people in the forests, in the orchards, in the fields. And I sing. Every day I am on my knees at 8am and at 8pm for prayer, at 7am for Mass. God has not

abandoned me to hunger or thirst for an instant. There are difficult days, sometimes doubt and fear invade the soul. But I know what our task is and we must accomplish it to the end. How? God will provide.

"The young people of Sarajevo greet you. We are all praying that the 'pilgrimage of trust' in Munich will go well."

South Africa

Sharing our Hopes

In September, over 300 people attended a weekend of prayer and sharing in Kliptown, on the theme "Awaken to Joy!" Participants came from all the regions of the country and from all races. They took time to pray together, to listen to one another and to look for ways of being bearers of peace and reconciliation within the South African context. Some of the participants later expressed what had touched them:

"I feel closer to God and it gave more meaning to my existence. The best thing it did for me was to meet other race groups and learn how they are affected by the current situation here. It moved me to realize that no matter who we are and what differences we have, we all come from God!" (Benoni)

"I was able to understand what peace was for the first time in many years." (Kliptown)

"Many things I have learned about prayer, being with God, and trusting him. Hope is the greatest instrument in this turbulent world that we are living in. We need to share with our communities, families and friends what we have shared here. To invite others to come and share a similar experience." (Ga-Rankuwa)

Along the same lines as these echoes from a weekend gathering, a young man from Capetown writes how he sees the vocation of Christians today in his country.

"The situation in South Africa can be described as being 'tough' and 'hard'. People talk tough. They act tough. People become hard. It was recently said by a political leader that the conditions are hard and only those who can survive these conditions will win. And yet, in a situation like this, I believe Christians must display the quality of gentleness and tenderness. 'Be as wise as a serpent and as gentle as a dove' is a text that immediately comes to mind. Gentleness and wisdom is a combination that we all need in this situation.

"The wisdom we need can only be obtained from above, through contemplation and struggle. And not a gentleness that is gentle on evil, but one that is like water on a flame. That coolness will then allow wisdom to be expressed and lived out. I'm writing you at a time when yet another hundred people have been killed in political violence. Politicians are blaming each other, Christian leaders call for peace and next week the cycle of bloodshed will continue. Perhaps another word for wisdom could be realism.

"We need to be realistic about our situ-

ation. The forces of violence are not going to change overnight. Apartheid has truly been evil and has 'evangelized' many over many years, to such an extent that life has become cheap.

"We need to work for peace. Perhaps the phrase 'without humiliation to the other person' is one that we need to apply in South Africa. Many children and young people have not been exposed to a view different from what they have learned in their homes and communities. Apartheid has divided us so much that we have not been able to speak to each other as human beings. We have become intolerant of each other's views and have labelled the other person in various ways when we have not been able to win an argument. Wisdom and gentleness. The latter is one of the fruits of the Spirit. It is associated with kindness, friendliness, respect and peacefulness in the New Testament.

"I would like to end with a text from James: 'Is there anyone among you who is wise and understanding? He is to prove it by his good life, by his good deeds performed with humility and wisdom. But if in your heart you are jealous, bitter and selfish, don't sin against the truth by boasting of your wisdom. Such wisdom does not come down from heaven; it belongs to the world. The wisdom from above is pure first of all; it is also peaceful, gentle and friendly; it is full of compassion and produces a harvest of good deeds; it is free from prejudice and hypocrisy. And goodness is the harvest that is produced from the seeds the peacemakers plant in peace' (James 3,13-18)."

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